
Transportation Committee

HB 1991

Brief Description: Allowing the use of digital license plates.

Sponsors: Representatives Lovick, Fey, Sells and Valdez.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Licensing to approve the use of digital license plates as an alternative to the metal license plates that are affixed to the rear of vehicles.
- Provides standards and regulations for digital license plate design, use, and capabilities.

Hearing Date: 2/18/19

Staff: Patricia Hasan (786-7292).

Background:

License Plates.

Vehicles, unless specifically exempt, must be registered with the state and must display license plates or decals to be operated on public roadways. The Department of Licensing (DOL) is responsible for providing license plates to the registered owner of a vehicle.

Washington license plates:

- may vary in background, color, and design;
- must be legible and clearly identifiable as a Washington license plate;
- must designate the name of the State of Washington without abbreviation;
- must be treated with fully reflectorized materials designed to increase visibility and legibility at night (except for license plates issued before January 1, 1968); and
- must be of a size and color and show the registration period as determined by the DOL.

Any special license plates approved by the DOL and enacted into law by the Legislature may display a symbol or artwork approved by the DOL.

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For successful vehicle registration applications, the DOL must issue to the registered vehicle owner two identical license plates, each containing the same license plate number. One license plate must be issued if the vehicle is a trailer, semitrailer, camper, moped, collector vehicle, horseless carriage, or motorcycle. License plates must be attached conspicuously at the front and rear of each vehicle if two license plates have been issued or attached to the rear of the vehicle if one license plate has been issued. License plates must be kept clean and able to be plainly seen and read at all times and must be attached in a horizontal position at a distance of not more than four feet from the ground.

Standard issue license plates, special license plates, and personalized license plates must be replaced when ownership of the vehicle changes (with some exceptions), but the registered owner may retain the license plates and transfer them to a replacement vehicle of the same use classification. License plates are also required to be replaced if the plates assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, or destroyed, or if one or both plates have become so illegible or are in such a condition as to be difficult to distinguish. Registered vehicle owners with horseless carriage license plates, Medal of Honor license plates, and license plates for commercial motor vehicles with a gross weight greater than 26,000 pounds do not have to replace their license plates when taking ownership of a new vehicle.

Digital License Plates.

A digital license plate is an identification sign mounted on a vehicle that has an electronic display and emits a wireless signal that can be used for tracking and digital monitoring services. A digital license plate would replace a traditional metal license plate that is affixed to a vehicle. Digital license plates can potentially allow multiple services to be handled wirelessly, including automated vehicle registration and renewal, tolling payments, parking payments, messaging, and advertising.

Digital license plates are approved for use in California, Arizona, and Michigan. Florida law authorizes the state's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to evaluate technologies for alternative license plates. In Texas, a bill was introduced in the 2019 legislative session that would allow the state's Department of Public Safety to conduct a digital license plate pilot program.

The 2018 Supplemental Transportation Budget included a proviso for the DOL to conduct a study to evaluate options and potential methods for allowing digital license plates in Washington. The final report was required to include information on the durability and legibility of digital license plates in different weather conditions, costs, data security, tolling and vehicle fees, protection of personal and vehicle information, and other implementation issues. The report was provided to the transportation committees of the Legislature on December 31, 2018.

Ingress Protection Rating.

An Ingress Protection (IP) rating, also known as an International Protection rating, is the standard used to define the level of sealing effectiveness of electrical enclosures against intrusion from foreign bodies such as dirt, dust, and water. The rating is indicated with an "IP" followed by two numerals. The first digit following the "IP" indicates the level of protection that the enclosure provides against solid bodies, and the second digit indicates the level of protection that the enclosure provides against liquids. A first digit of "6" indicates protection from total dust

ingress, and a second digit of "6" indicates protection from high pressure water jets from any direction.

Summary of Bill:

Digital license plates are defined as a license plate that: (1) displays the letters and numbers assigned to the vehicle by the DOL, the name of the state, and any other information required by the DOL, in the manner prescribed by the DOL; (2) produces a crisp, bright, reflective screen; and (3) is certified as an automotive grade IP66 product.

The DOL is authorized to approve the use of digital license plates purchased by vehicle owners as an alternative to the metal license plates that are affixed to the rear of vehicles. The DOL may issue one metal plate to be attached to the front of the vehicle if an approved digital license plate is affixed to the rear of the vehicle.

The digital license plate design must be consistent with the metal license plate that is issued by the DOL to the customer. Any changes to the plate design that are required for proper rendering of the digital license plate must be approved by the DOL. Digital license plates are not required to be treated with reflectorized material. Digital license plates are not required to be replaced if the owner of the digital license plate takes ownership or changes ownership of a vehicle.

Digital license plates must meet the following requirements:

- be visible at all times, including while the vehicle is parked or turned off;
- the letters and numbers must be of sufficient size to be plainly readable during daylight hours from a distance of 100 feet;
- the display device must be visible at night and not obstruct the vehicle's equipped illumination light or must contain an internal light source; and
- must contain a user selectable feature that may be turned on or off as to whether the digital license plate collects or stores vehicle location and telemetry information.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 13, 2019.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.